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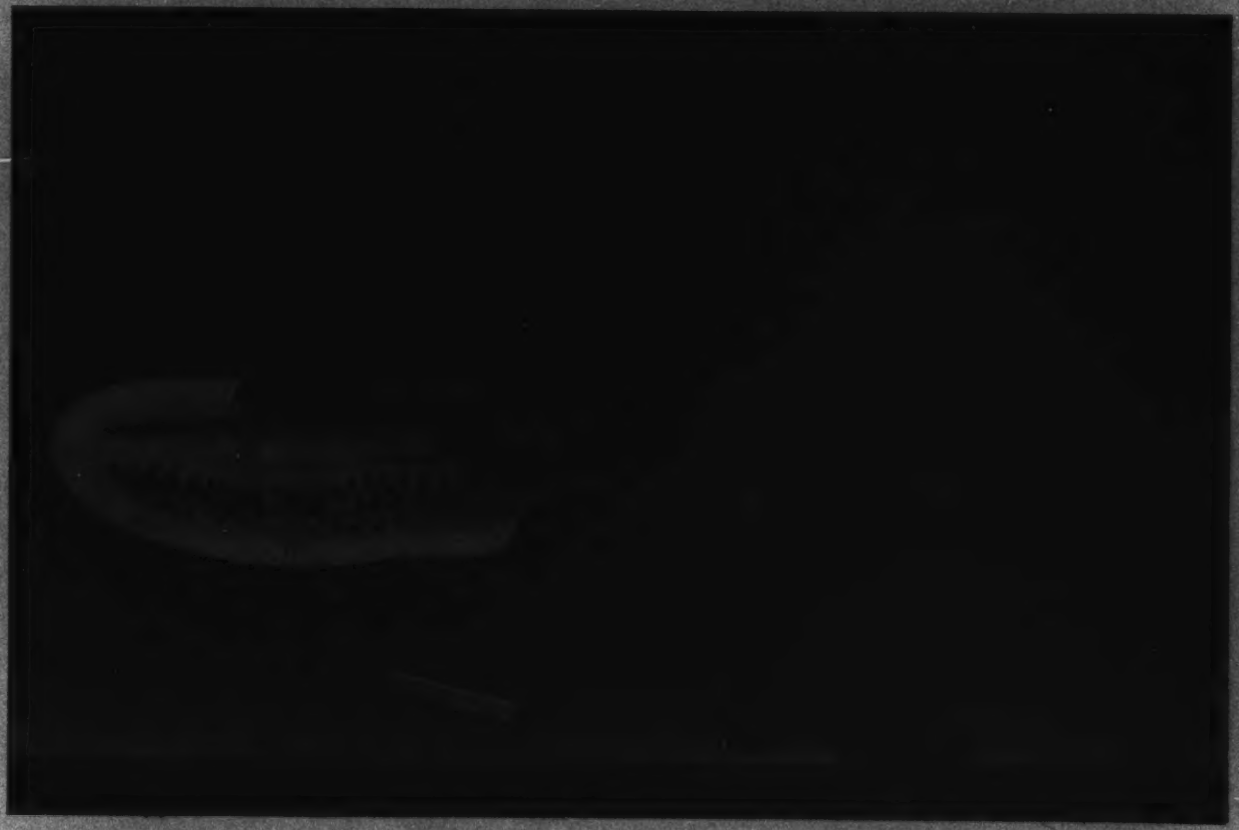
General

78.M.

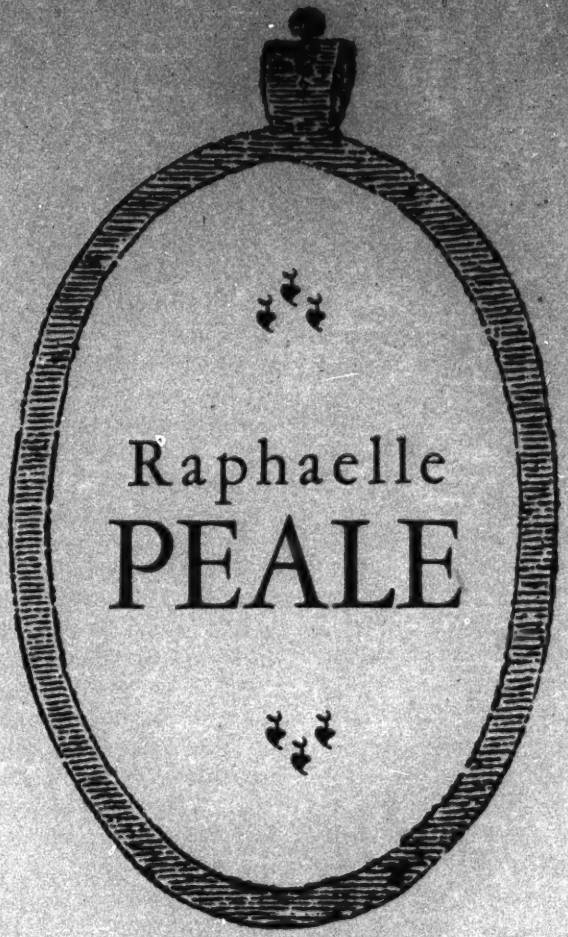
Raphaelle Peale

1774-1825

still lifes and portraits



Still Life with Watermelon, Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem



Raphaelle PEALE

Exhibition

Milwaukee Art Center: *January 15th through February 15th, 1959*

M. Knoedler & Company, New York: *March 2nd through March 31st, 1959*

30

Acknowledgments:

In behalf of the Milwaukee Art Center and M. Knoedler and Company, may I thank all who have kindly lent paintings to this the first one-man exhibition of the work of Raphaelle Peale. We wish to thank Charles Coleman Sellers for his introduction to this catalog, a biography that for its truth, humor and sensitivity matches Raphaelle Peale's painting.

In assembling this exhibition I have been assisted by many, including Virgil Barker, John I. H. Baur, Theodore Bolton, Barbara Bull, Charles D. Childs, Elizabeth Clare, William F. Davidson, Charles H. Elam, Helmut Von Erffa, Alfred Frankenstein, William H. Gerdts, Mrs. Edith Halpert, Mrs. Henry W. Howell, Jr., Louis C. Jones, Katherine M. Knox, Henri Marceau, Helen G. McCormack, James H. Ricau, Anna Wells Rutledge, Victor D. Spark, Frederick A. Sweet, and R. N. Williams, 2nd.

We wish to thank Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem for lending us color plates of their still life and for their generous contribution to the publication of this catalog.

EDWARD H. DWIGHT, *Director*
Milwaukee Art Center

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The World of Raphaelle Peale

Charles Coleman Sellers

That the first exhibition dedicated to the art of Raphaelle Peale should come one hundred and thirty-four years after his death is not to be taken as an honor long overdue and now belatedly accorded. It recognizes, rather, that the best of his paintings are of our own time more truly than of his. They have a peculiarly modern appeal in their very personal motivation, and in their use of realism as an escape from reality. More and more often he has been cited as an original artist unmatched by the plodding portraitists around him. Historically, he is the founder of still life painting in America. That other painters regarded such compositions as fit only for school work or amateurs may have encouraged him to take it as his own, to develop it with his wonderful virtuosity and to find in it a little province of personal supremacy, of surprises and satisfactions, of no money value but of solace and, always, of escape. The world in which he moved from place to place so laughingly had not been kind to Raphaelle Peale.

He was intrinsically a product and a part of the Peale clan. He grew up at the height of his father's passion for art, science, liberty, the essential goodness of man, the pleasures of virtue and the virtue of innocent pleasures, and that Eighteenth Century sense of a soaring release from all the trammels of the past. He absorbed his art and his gentle, shiftless idealism in childhood, together. The brother and sisters born before him had died in infancy, leaving him both the eldest and the first to be endowed with an artist's name — the artist whom painters revered above all others and for whom Benjamin West had named his own eldest son. At his birth, February 17, 1774, Charles Willson Peale had at last become established after years of hardship as a successful painter of portraits in large and miniature. The family moved from Annapolis to Philadelphia in 1776 and was engulfed at once in the dangers and confusions of the war for freedom. Twice they were refugees hiding in the countryside. Raphaelle had been two years of age when it all began, and was a slim boy of nine at the end. News of the peace brought to the family a joy proportionate to its hopes and sufferings. The paterfamilias outdid himself in creating that lighted transparent triumphal arch for the official celebration, towering to the height of three storeys and reaching all the way across Market Street. Raphaelle, with his Uncle James, was perched on a neighboring rooftop. From there they were to launch the figure of Peace on her journey out of darkness and across to the arch, there to be greeted by a thunderous display of fireworks. Instead, they saw the whole affair catch fire by accident and go up in smoke and flame, an event typical, though it be unkind to say so, of the Peale pattern. So many things aimed so high, but failed to rise.

Raphaelle was in at the beginning of the one Peale project fated to prove exultantly successful. This was the museum of natural history which had its start, really, in 1786, after the exhibition of "moving pictures" failed to shake the world. "Peale's Museum" did not, over the years, fulfill its initial purpose of becoming a combined temple and university of Deistic theory and scientific knowledge, but it did prove enormously remunerative simply as popular entertainment of a sort morally acceptable to the American public. Here Raphaelle, from the age of twelve into

young manhood, was his father's assistant. Together, they developed their own system for preserving animals, birds and fish with an arsenic compound, mounting them in life-like attitudes against painted habitat backgrounds. This "world in miniature" was to be, itself, the background both of his youth and his later frustrations.

Raphaelle, like all the Peale children, was spoiled. The new theory of the natural goodness of man was responsible for this, though old Peggy, their nurse, exceeded even the theory. In the spring of 1790, their ailing mother died. Each of them had been taken, one by one, to receive her last farewell, Raphaelle first, then Angelica Kauffmann, Rembrandt, Titian, Rubens, Sophonisba Angusciola, and toddling little Rosalba Carriera. Four months later the widower set out for the Eastern Shore of Maryland with the avowed intention of finding there a new wife, taking Raphaelle with him as he had done before on his journeyings. Raphaelle was a good companion and was not, perhaps, helpful with the other children at home. He served as message bearer in the ill-starred courtships which followed. His father's remarriage may have added to his restlessness. He broke away from museum routine to collect specimens in Georgia, brought back others in the next year from South America, returning in time to join the "Whiskey Rebellion" army and to paint the portrait of his little brother, Rubens, in uniform as mascot of the crack "Macpherson's Blues."

In 1795, his twenty-first year, the exhibition of the "Columbianum," that first and short-lived artists' academy, was held. Raphaelle was listed in the catalogue as "Portrait Painter," and represented by thirteen works, a larger number than any other with the exception of the veteran William Birch. Five of these were portraits and five still life. The others, "A Covered Painting," "A Bill" and "A Deception," are the earliest we know of his *trompe l'oeil* productions. Yet it was his father who had contributed, in the celebrated "Staircase," the greatest eye fooler. It featured Raphaelle standing with palette and maul stick in the foreground, but it must have made his smaller pieces seem trivial indeed. Too, it was his younger brother, Rembrandt, who had been the prize pupil of the academy school, and whom their father now regarded as holding the greater artistic promise. It was for Rembrandt that President Washington was asked to pose in that year. All the family shared in the sittings (this was the occasion of Gilbert Stuart's "Pealed all around" quip), but Raphaelle's was the most modest effort, a profile on paper. The two brothers spent that winter in South Carolina, painting and exhibiting portraits, the carefree elder overshadowed by the younger's earnest dedication to accepted ideals. The two set up a museum of their own in Baltimore in 1797, and while this brief venture still promised success Raphaelle was married to Martha McGlathery, "Patty," as they called her, pretty and high-tempered. By 1800 they were in Philadelphia as rival artists, the one sententiously announcing that he had discarded his surname and would be known henceforth to ladies and gentlemen solely as "REMBRANDT," while the other advertised under the heading, "A NAME!" that Raphaelle Peale, "To make himself eminent," was reducing the price of his miniatures to ten dollars. Successful painters were asking fifty.

As success eluded Raphaelle he reached the farther for it. He had turned to science, patenting a preservative for ships' timbers (the museum arsenic solution) in 1798, then a new plan for heating houses, then a method for purifying sea water, and finally, in 1803, publishing a new theory of the movements of the astral bodies in space. In his "theory of the universe" the old scientific spirit and the new romanticism somehow joined hands, and his dream of electrical attractions

and repulsions was widely published in the papers. But the pith of Raphaelle's philosophy, the thought most constantly on mind and tongue, was simpler — that the key to art is in the hands only of those who can whistle, sing, or play upon some musical instrument. So he went on, painting portraits, lowering his prices, trying to attract patrons with humorous advertisements which must have repelled the best of them. He even solicited "painting from the corpse," that least attractive branch of his art, listing it under the heading "Still Life." His father set him up with a silhouette cutting machine and for a time he travelled widely, making money, and compensating for the further loss of professional standing in the vastness of his production — profiles by the hundreds of thousands, his claims taken up and repeated in newspapers all over the union.

By 1810, Raphaelle was a drunkard, dependant on what Patty could earn by keeping lodgers and boarders and on gifts from his father. His hands were deformed by an arthritic condition which he blamed on his work with the museum preservative. His father had retired from the museum, a rich man, and Rubens was in charge. There followed the years of unhappiness at home, of unhappy wanderings afield, a gentle, plaintive, friendly sot whom the world had left behind. He was still, as he always had been, a wonderful entertainer. As a mimic he could take off public figures to perfection, had an inexhaustible fund of parlor tricks and could recite the "Crooked-mouth Family" as no other. He was a master ventriloquist and when, playing truant from home fare, he would preside at the long table of the Black Bear Tavern, he could make the turkey scream with pain as he thrust in the fork, or the fried fish plead for its life in sepulchral tones, while the country folk along the board goggled at the spectacle.

It was anything, now, for laughing attention. The "covered picture" in this exhibition, which has come to be called *After the Bath*, was painted for no other purpose than to turn a laugh on Patty, while the seven children and her little flock of boarders looked on. One wonders whether this could have been, actually, the *Venus Rising from the Sea*, exhibited and offered for sale at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1822. Raphaelle was represented in almost all of the Academy shows, occasionally with a portrait but mostly with still life. His still life rarely sold. James Peale's fruit-pieces did better, for they conveyed a sense of profusion and good living. Raphaelle's rather stark arrangements, for all their marvellous technical skill, did not please so well. Some were raffled off, a tradesman sometimes with difficulty persuaded to accept one in settlement of a bill. So it went on until the end in that cold and windy March of 1825. He had been writing "lovesick" poetry for a baker to put into cakes. The task depressed him, for he preferred, he said, "the comic," and times were bad indeed when an artist must write verses for a baker. The baker made it up to him in toddy, and they brought him in, hours later, from the streets. Raphaelle, awakening, saw his family gathered round and whispered that he "should die contented, for he never did injury to any man."

There had been bred within this painter a call to the lofty and obscure and an artist's sensitive pride. He had seen from within himself what held the sun and stars and planets in their courses, but could not find his way and purposes among the nearer things. He had to have, somewhere in the world, a place of perfection of his own, though it should be only the little one of laughter, of surprise, only the illusion of fruit upon a table rich with the juices of summer.

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STILL LIFE

1. STILL LIFE WITH FOX GRAPES AND PEACHES, 1821
12⅜x18¼ inches
Lent by Amherst College
Amherst, Massachusetts

2. STILL LIFE WITH PEACHES, 1821
13-3/16 x 19-3/16 inches
Lent by The Brooklyn Museum
Brooklyn, New York
Polhemus Fund

3. STILL LIFE, 1818
10¾ x 15½ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Graham
Stamford, Connecticut

4. STILL LIFE, 1822
22 x 26 inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Graham
Stamford, Connecticut

5. STILL LIFE WITH HERRING, 1815
10⅛ x 15 inches
Lent by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

6. PEACHES AND BUNCH OF RIPE GRAPES, 1815
14½ x 17½ inches
Lent by Mrs. Yarnall Jacobs
New York, New York

7. STILL LIFE: BALSAM APPLES AND TURNIPS, C. 1810
6¾ x 11¾ inches
Lent by The Knoedler Galleries
New York, New York

8. DISH OF BLACKBERRIES, 1815
7¼ x 10¼ inches
Lent by Mr. Paul Magriel
New York, New York

9. STILL LIFE WITH STEAK, C. 1815
13⅜ x 19½ inches
Lent by Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute
Utica, New York

10. AFTER THE BATH, 1823
29 x 24 inches
Lent by Nelson Gallery—
Atkins Museum, Nelson Fund
Kansas City, Missouri

11. FOX GRAPES AND PEACHES, 1815
9¾ x 11½ inches
Lent by The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

12. APPLES AND FOX GRAPES, 1815
9¾ x 11⅜ inches
Lent by The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

13. PEACHES, 1817
13½ x 20 inches
Lent by Mr. James H. Ricau
New York, New York

14. STILL LIFE WITH WATERMELON, C. 1813
12½ x 18½ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coleman Sellers
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

15. PATCH PICTURE FOR DR. PHYSICK, C. 1806
21½ x 17½ inches
Lent by Mr. Cyrus Semour
New York, New York

16. STILL LIFE WITH WATERMELON, 1822
24¼ x 29¼ inches
Lent by The Springfield Museum of Fine Arts
Springfield, Massachusetts

17. A DECEPTION, 1802
16 x 10¾ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Calvin W. Stillman
Chicago, Illinois

18. STILL LIFE WITH WATERMELON, 1822
16½ x 26½ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem
New York, New York

19. STILL LIFE WITH RAISIN CAKE, 1813
7⅞ x 11⅛ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Stralem
New York, New York

20. STILL LIFE, 1813
20⅜ x 25⅜ inches
Lent by Mr. Walter Stuempfig
Gwynedde Valley, Pennsylvania

21. STILL LIFE, C. 1820
18-11/16 x 23 inches
Lent by The Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio
Gift of Florence Scott Libbey

22. STILL LIFE, C. 1810
11¾ x 15 inches
Lent by Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut
The Ella Gallup Sumner and
Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

MINIATURES

23. DOYLE E. SWEENEY
2¾ x 2¼ inches
Lent by Amherst College
Amherst, Massachusetts

24. YOUNG MAN, 1803
3⅛ x 2½ inches
Lent by Department of Fine Arts
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Gift of Mr. Herbert DuPuy

25. YOUNG MAN, 1810
2⅜ x 2 inches
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Arthur M. Greenwood
Marlborough, Massachusetts

26. LAFAYETTE, C. 1824
3¾ x 2¾ inches
Lent by Lafayette College Library
Easton, Pennsylvania
Gift of Stuart W. Jackson

27. CAPTAIN JAMES ROBKE CALL NDER, 1811
2¼ x 1¾ inches
Lent by Maryland Historical Society
Baltimore, Maryland

28. MAJOR JAMES FERGUSON
2⅜ x 2 inches
Lent by Maryland Historical Society
Baltimore, Maryland

29. MRS. JOHN MONTGOMERY, 1800
3⅜ x 2-11/16 inches
Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, New York
Isaac D. Fletcher Fund

30. MAN IN GRAY COAT, 1819
2¾ x 2-3/16 inches
Lent by Milwaukee Art Center
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Gift of Mrs. William H. Marshall

31. CATHERINE MELLISH
2¾ x 2¼ inches
Lent by Philadelphia Museum of Art
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Mrs. Daniel J. McCarthy Collection

32. TWO CHILDREN, C. 1795
3 x 2⅜ inches
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coleman Sellers
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

33. RUBENS PEALE
5 x 4⅛ inches
Lent by National Collection of Fine Arts
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

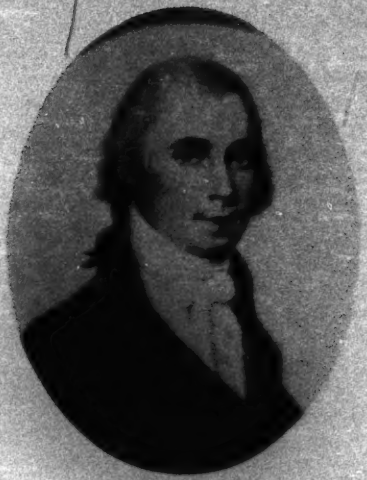
34. ROBERT OLIPHANT, 1799
3 x 2-5/16 inches
Lent by National Collection of Fine Arts
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

35. WADE MOSBY, C. 1796
2¾ x 2-3/16 inches
Lent by Mrs. Harry I. Stern
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

36. MRS. WADE MOSBY, C. 1796
2¾ x 2-3/16 inches
Lent by Mrs. Harry I. Stern
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

37. MR. "C. P.", C. 1795
1⅞ x 1⅜ inches
Lent by Mrs. Harry I. Stern
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

38. ROBERT KENNEDY, 1799
3⅜ x 2⅞ inches
Lent by Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven, Connecticut
The Mabel Brady Garvan Collection



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All still life paintings are oil on wood panels excepting 4, 10, 16, 18 and 20 which are oil on canvas. Nos. 15 and 17 are watercolor on paper.

All miniatures are watercolor on ivory excepting 26 which is oil on paper. No. 33 is watercolor on paper.

Catalog design: John J. Reiss / Three thousand copies of this catalog have been printed in January, 1959 by the Hammersmith-Kortmeyer Company, Milwaukee.

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM LIBRARY

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18-11-1919

Raphaelle Peale,
Portrait Painter

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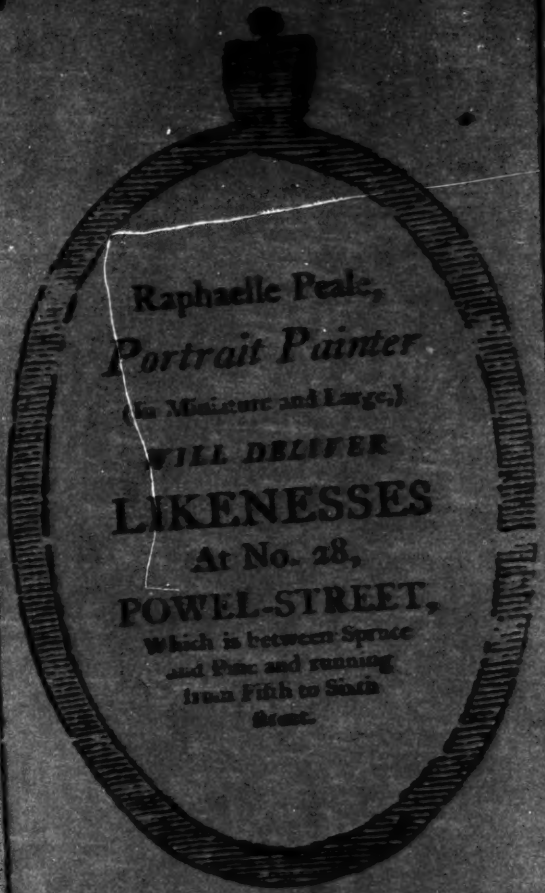
DEATH

Deprives us of our Friends,
And then we regret having neglected an opportunity of obtaining their

LIKENESSES.



Those who prefer R. PEALE'S work, must apply within six weeks.
His Price is TEN DOLLARS.—
NO LIKENESS NO PAY.

August 3.